

Message Text

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65-62

ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3369

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

USUN 475

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR

SUBJ: PRESIDENT MEETING IN PANAMA--HIGHLIGHTS OF TORRIJOS PRESS
CONFERENCE MARCH 23

REF: PANAMA 1656

1. CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT GENERAL OMAR TORRIJOS AND PRESIDENTS
PEREZ, LOPEZ AND OBUDER INTERRUPTED DAY-LONG WORKING SESSION
MARCH 23 ON CONTADORA ISLAND FOR TORRIJOS PRESS CONFERENCE
WITH LOCAL AND VISITING NEWSMEN. HIGHLIGHTS OF TORRIJOS'
REMARKS--FULL TEXT OF PRESS CONFERENCE CARRIED BY FBIS--FOLLOWS.

2. CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS - ASKED WHAT ACHIEVEMENTS HAVE
BEEN MADE IN NEGOTIATIONS TO DATE, TORRIJOS REPLIED MOST
SIGNIFICANT WAS "TO HAVE MADE A NATIONAL RELIGION INTO A
RELIGION FOR AMERICA" AND NOTED THAT GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT WAS
TO HAVE "THREE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT AMERICAN LEADERS" IN
PANAMA DISCUSSING THE PROBLEM. ASKED IF PANAMA WAS ATTEMPTING
TO NEGOTIATE A TREATY PROVIDING FOR A NEUTRAL
CANAL, WITHOUT U.S. DEFENSE, TORRIJOS REPLIED "THAT IS
EXACTLY WHAT WE ARE DISCUSSING." CALLED ON TO SAY WHETHER
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GOP WOULD NATIONALIZE CANAL IF U.S. SENATE REJECTED A NEW

TREATY, TORRIJOS REMARKED THAT "IF YOU ARE GOING TO HIT SOMEONE, YOU SHOULD NOT ANNOUNCE IT." OBSERVING THAT HE WOULD ALSO NOT COMMENT BECAUSE "THEY NO LONGER PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT I SAY," THE GENERAL REMINDED REPORTERS OF ASST. SECRETARY ROGERS' WARNING THAT NON-APPROVAL OF A NEW TREATY COULD RESULT IN PARALYSIS OF THE CANAL.

3. URRUTIA-THOMSON TREATY - QUERIED ABOUT THE URRUTIA-THOMSON TREATY ISSUE, TORRIJOS STATED QUESTION WOULD BE "COMPLETELY ANSWERED" BY JOINT DECLARATION. HE WISHED TO LEAVE NO UNSOLVED PROBLEMS FOR FUTURE PANAMANIAN GENERATIONS.

4. CANAL TOLLS - IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION WHETHER PANAMA WOULD RAISE CANAL TOLLS, TORRIJOS STATED PANAMA WOULD FIRST "CONSULT" WITH THE WATERWAY'S USERS. BLAMING "ILL-MEANING U.S. INTERESTS" FOR PREDICTING PANAMA WOULD RAISE TOLLS, TORRIJOS OBSERVED GOP MUST CONSULT BECAUSE OF IMPACT ON ECONOMICS AND BECAUSE PANAMA'S STRUGGLE "WILL SUCCEED ONLY TO THE EXTENT THAT PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE WORLD GIVE IT THEIR SUPPORT."

5. CIA ACTIVITIES - WHEN ASKED IF GOP HAD ANY PROOF OF CIA MEDLLING IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF PANAMA, THE GENERAL NOTED THAT INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES DO NOT LEAVE MARKS, "ON CERTAIN OCCASIONS ONE CAN SENSE THAT THEY HAVE BEEN AROUND BUT...IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE WHAT THEY ARE DOING OR PLAN TO DO." WITH REGARD TO "JOINT MEASURES" LATIN GOVERNMENTS MIGHT TAKE TO PREVENT BIG POWER INTERVENTION, TORRIJOS SAID ONE MEANS WAS PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE PROBLEM, "ONE FORM OF DEFENSE IS THIS NEWS CONFERENCE," THE OTHER IS THROUGH A READING OF HISTORY. REPLYING LATER TO A SIMILAR QUESTION, TORRIJOS OBSERVED HE HAD SPENT MUCH TIME "READING BIOGRAPHIES OF CESAR AUGUSTO SANDINO AND HO CHI MINH."

6. COMMENTS BY PANAMANIAN UN AMBASSADOR - INTERVIEWED SEPARATELY, PANAMA'S AMBASSADOR TO UN AQUILINO BOYD, ADDRESSING THE CURRENT CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS, STRESSED THAT TALKS ARE IN MOST IMPORTANT PHASE. INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR PANAMA, ACCORDING TO BOYD, IS "INDISPENSABLE"

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AT THIS CRITICAL POINT AND , FOR THAT REASON, GOP IS SEEKING BACKING IN UN, OAS AND OTHER FORUMS. IN THIS CONNECTION, BOYD OBSERVED THAT GOP'S CAMPAIGN FOR UN SECURITY COUNCIL POSITION WAS RESPONSE TO RESOLUTION OF 37 SENATORS. BOYD NOTED ASST. SECRETARY ROGERS' OBSERVATION THAT, WHEN DRAFT TREATY IS PRESENTED, SEVERAL SENATORS NOW OPPOSED WOULD CHANGE THEIR VIEWS. WITH REGARD TO OPINION IN US, THE AMBASSADOR ALSO REPORTEDLY STATED PANAMANIAN HAVE BEEN

ATTEMPTING TO CONVINCE U.S. OFFICIALS THAT IT IS THEIR
RESPONSIBILITY TO EDUCATE U.S. OPINION ON THE CANAL
PROBLEM. PRESIDENT FORD, SAID BOYD, SHOULD MENTION THE
CANAL PROBLEM IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCES. BOYD SAID HE
WAS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT SENATE APPROVAL OF NEW TREATY BECAUSE
THE U.S. WISHES TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH LATIN AMERICA.
JORDEN

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